DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 039 PS 025 263

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TITLE Staff Supervision in Long Day Care Centres in New South Wales.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 16p.; In: Australian Research in Early Childhood Education. Volume 1, 1996; see PS 025 254.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Day Care Centers; Early Childhood Education; Foreign Countries; Mail Surveys; *Professional Development; *Supervision; Supervisor Qualifications; *Supervisors
IDENTIFIERS Australia (New South Wales)

ABSTRACT

This study focused on strategies used by supervisors in New South Wales, Australia, to enhance and promote professional development in their day care staff. The directors of a random selection of 324 child care centers were surveyed by mail. The number of surveys returned was 162, for a response rate of 50 percent. Findings indicated that most of the respondents were teaching-directors (72 percent). Most were trained in early childhood education and had less than 10 years teaching experience. About 25 percent of their teachers had training in early childhood education. Almost half of the supervisors allocated up to 4 hours for staff supervision, and almost two-thirds of the supervisors indicated that they had release time from face-to-face teaching. About one-third felt that they had been inadequately prepared for supervision duties. Strategies used by supervisors to enhance their supervision skills included inservice training and professional reading. The most difficult issues in staff supervision included raising personal issues with the staff, staff conflict, and assisting staff to set professional goals. The most common methods to assess staff professional development needs were informal discussion and a staff appraisal form. A number of variables were analyzed to identify factors in the workplace that have an impact on the nature of the supervision task and the ability of the director to undertake supervision, including management structure, center size, and allocation of release time. The only variables related to difficulty in supervision were years of teaching experience and years of director experience. (Contains 30 references.) (KDFB)

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STAFF SUPERVISION IN LONG DAY CARE CENTRES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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ED 406 039

ABSTRACT

Staff supervision, now mandated by state regulations as the responsibility of the authorised supervisor in centre-based child care services, manifests itself in many forms. Strategies used to supervise staff in order to enhance and promote professional development were the focus of a study in which child care centre Directors in New South Wales were surveyed. A number of variables was analysed in order to determine factors in the workplace that impact on the ability of the Director to undertake supervision and also the nature of the supervision task. Variables including management structure, centre size, number and qualifications of staff employed, title of the Director and allocation of release time were not found to be significant in relation to the nature and style of supervision.

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INTRODUCTION

While current NSW centre-based services regulations mandate that the 'authorised supervisor' (the Director) undertakes supervision and ongoing professional development of staff, no direct provision is made to support Directors in attaining or developing supervisory skills. Implicit, then, is the assumption that Directors already possess such skills or are able to readily access resources to develop these skills.

WHAT IS SUPERVISION?

Effective supervision has been identified as a key factor in the development and maintenance of a positive working environment that is able to take into account the needs of the individual as well as the needs of the organisation (Hegland, 1984; Catron & Kendall, 1984; Katz, 1979).

The study of supervision constitutes a specialised body of knowledge that relates theories of supervision to specific supervisory practice. There is an extensive body of knowledge relating to general issues of supervision. Debate exists about the perceived and actual purpose of supervision. The term 'supervision' is often interchanged with terms such as 'professional development', 'evaluation' and 'staff appraisal'. Leadership, organisational commitment and the availability of resources have been identified as significant factors in supervisory practice. Attitudes and beliefs about the nature of supervision from both a personal and organisational perspective underpin supervisory practice.

In early childhood settings, the intensity of the relationships between staff, children and parents, as well as the nature of care and education of very young children, constitutes a unique working environment that requires the supervisor to have specialised skills and to utilise a range of supervision strategies to meet the needs of the diverse range of staff employed in centre-based services (Clyde & Ebbeck, 1988).

'Supervision' is a term used in a variety of work environments. Its application in the workplace may vary greatly from a technique which presupposes a hierarchy of power and knowledge to one of collaboration and empowerment. The primary function of supervision may be as a means of monitoring and measuring staff performance based on a set of minimum acceptable criteria, with conformity and collective performance being of paramount importance. Alternatively, it may serve

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as an open-ended function with an emphasis on the professional development of staff based on individual needs. Effective supervision which leads to positive growth in the area of professional development must focus on enhancing existing competencies while, at the same time, extending and challenging existing practice.

The proclamation of the NSW Children (Care and Protection) Act, 1987, and the subsequent introduction of the Centre-Based Services Regulations resulted in the mandating of ongoing supervision and professional development for staff in early childhood settings licensed by the state Department of Community Services (DOCS).

> *Under the terms of the Children (Care and Protection) Act, 1987, the Authorised Supervisor (Director) of a centre-based child care service shall: (5) Assist with the recruitment, selection and training of appropriate staff for the service and provide ongoing support, supervision and professional development for all staff members.*
>
> (Centre-Based Services Regulations, p44)

Staff supervision, a complex and often stressful task, is clearly, then, the responsibility of the Director (Authorised Supervisor). This is a challenge to Directors who already must carry out a diverse range of demanding tasks. The Director may or may not possess the necessary skills to competently supervise staff whose training, background and experiences may vary tremendously (Caruso & Fawcett, 1986; Hegland, 1984). Supervision is clearly linked in the Regulations to 'professional development'. To what extent supervision is used to promote and enhance professional development needs to be addressed in the context of the realities of teaching and working in centre-based services.

ISSUES OF SUPERVISION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

Elements that are vital to the provision of quality care in early childhood settings have been extensively documented and highlight the quality and commitment of staff as a critical component of quality care. It follows, then, that supervision and subsequent professional development of staff are essential to the ongoing provision of quality early childhood programs.

Existing models of teacher supervision, with a focus on the structured, formal school system, bear little resemblance in philosophy and context to the less formal setting of a child care centre (Varuli & Fyfe, 1993). There is a number of unique features of the early childhood setting that impact on the nature and practice of supervision in early childhood.

- Lack of clearly defined hierarchical roles. The practice of teamwork in the early childhood setting often results in a blurring of roles so that clear lines of responsibility are not established.

- Lack of role clarity for Director as a supervisor. Related to the blurring of roles is a lack of clarity for the Director in terms of supervisory roles and practice. Balancing between the role of teacher and the role of Director, supervision becomes a somewhat precarious task as the Director moves between working as a peer alongside staff to a supervisor whose task is to monitor and evaluate staff performance (Caruso, 1991).

- Diversity of team and curriculum. Unlike a formal school setting, where there is some consistency in the level of training and uniformity in the curriculum which teachers deliver, early childhood services are characterised by diversity of staffing and curriculum design.

- Lack of release time for both Director and staff to participate in supervision. Time, a critical factor in all supervision models, is perhaps most critical in the early childhood setting. It is more common for Directors to be designated 'Teacher-Director' than Non-Teaching Director

(LECS, 1992). This, combined with centre-based services' regulations in relation to staff: child ratios, means that obtaining release time from teaching is an ongoing dilemma. The current practice of employing Teacher-Directors obviously presents a very real barrier to the provision of effective staff supervision.

- Lack of a suitable model of supervision aimed at the early childhood setting.
- Lack of adequate training in supervision skills (Caruso, 1991; Caruso & Fawcett, 1986).

THE CONTEXT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Much of the recent work relating to models of teacher supervision focuses on the organisational setting of schools where historical issues of conformity, bureaucracy and top-down management have a significant impact on supervision strategies and practices. In order to fully understand the challenges of supervision facing the Director, it is necessary to consider the context in which supervision must take place (Whelan, 1993).

Multiple Staffing

The term 'multiple staffing' refers to the range of staff found within the early childhood setting who possess a variety of qualifications, training and experience related to the care and education of young children. A unique feature of multiple staffing is the lack of a clear definition of roles within the setting that commonly leads to a blurring and overlapping of roles. This lack of role clarity poses unique problems, particularly in terms of the interrelationship between professional status, personal and professional commitment and curriculum practice (Ebbeck, 1991; McNairy, 1988; Johnston, 1984). Equally complex are the planning, delivery and implementation of supervision for staff whose roles, training, experience and socio-cultural backgrounds are extremely diverse (Veale, 1991; Jorde-Bloom, 1988; McNairy, 1988).

Role Diversity and the Concept of Professionalism

The early childhood industry is perhaps one of the few workplaces where roles are not clearly defined and where the very complex nature of the work results in a great deal of overlap of the various existing roles. Ebbeck (1991) argues that this lack of clarity in relation to roles results in an erosion, rather than a strengthening, of the early childhood profession. The concept of teamwork has suffered because of this confusion in roles. Ebbeck and Clyde (1988) equate this loss of professional identity with the lack of clarity in relation to the differing roles and expectations of staff in the diverse range of early childhood settings. One of the factors that serve to set early childhood professionals apart from other professional groups is not the lack of professional training but the ongoing difficulty experienced by early childhood professionals in promoting themselves professionally. The sharing of roles reinforces the notion that working in an early childhood setting is something that almost anyone can undertake. Therefore, staff supervision must be implemented in such a way that it promotes the skills and knowledge base of early childhood professionals (Powell, 1982).

The Concept of Teamwork

The constant tendency to interchange roles within the team indicates the range and complexities of tasks to be undertaken and implies, in part, a lack of respect for roles within the organisation both as individuals and as collective members of a team. Caruso and Fawcett (1986) have found that role sharing can become a source of resentment among staff whose working conditions are of a lesser quality than that of the teacher.

Supervision can address this problem. The practice of task sharing has contributed to the loss of identity and lack of clearly defined roles within early childhood settings. Misunderstanding of the

concept and nature of teamwork has the potential to result in resentment, tension and an unwillingness to address professional issues. In the early childhood setting, this issue is further compounded by existing inequities in wages and conditions and the diversity of experience and qualifications found within early childhood settings.

It is essential to understand the context of children's services in order to fully explore issues relating to staff supervision in long day care. Constraints of access to resources and limited availability of time to devote to supervision are realities that shape supervisory practice. Research relating specifically to supervision issues and practices in precompulsory early childhood settings is limited. In order to promote effective supervision strategies, it is necessary to determine current supervisory practices as well as issues of concern to supervisors in the early childhood field.

METHOD

A postal survey of randomly selected long day care services in NSW was used for the research methodology. The questionnaires were distributed to metropolitan, rural and semi-rural areas of NSW. Each questionnaire contained 129 items and was developed as a result of a review of current literature relating to staff supervision. After piloting the questionnaire with three early childhood directors, modifications were made to the final format. The survey was eight pages in length and was estimated to take between 20-30 minutes to complete. Open-ended questions, as well as rating and ranking scales, were used.

Survey Design

The questionnaire was divided into three parts:

Part A Information about you and your service
Part B Issues in supervision
Part C Staff development strategies

A request for written Staff Assessment Profiles was also included.

'Information about you and your service' consisted of questions relating to management structure; number of licensed places; number and qualifications of all full-time and part-time staff currently employed; title, qualifications and length of time employed in present position; years in present position and previous experience as a supervisor.

'Issues in supervision' consisted of questions relating to preparedness for supervision role; identification of supervision tasks in terms of degree of difficulty currently experienced; strategies used by the supervisor to enhance own supervision skills; strategies used to assess the professional strengths and weaknesses of staff.

The list of supervisor areas of difficulty was based on the work of Johnson (1984) who sought to identify what early childhood teachers experience as problem areas.

'Staff Development Strategies' consisted of questions relating to: use of specific staff development strategies and perceived effectiveness; how professional development information is shared by staff.

Written Staff Assessment Profiles: Respondents were asked to provide a copy of any written Staff Assessment Profile currently being used. The profiles were analysed using a coding system which identified a focus on seven general groupings.

Survey Procedures

Questionnaires and letters were sent to Authorised Supervisors of 324 long day care centres in NSW. The services, chosen at random, represented a range of management structures including community based, private for profit, local council, work based, church sponsored, Sydney Day Nursery Association, Kindergarten Union of NSW and TAFE organisations.

Analysis of Data

Data was analysed using the SAS System (1989). Cross tabulations were applied to a number of variables; however, in all cases, the cells had expected counts of less than 5, indicating that the chi-square test would not necessarily be valid. It should be noted that, for all questions, there was a number of 'nil' responses which are indicated in the Tables by 'missing'. When comparing variables, this has the effect on some tables of percentages not adding up to 100%.

RESULTS

Survey Sample

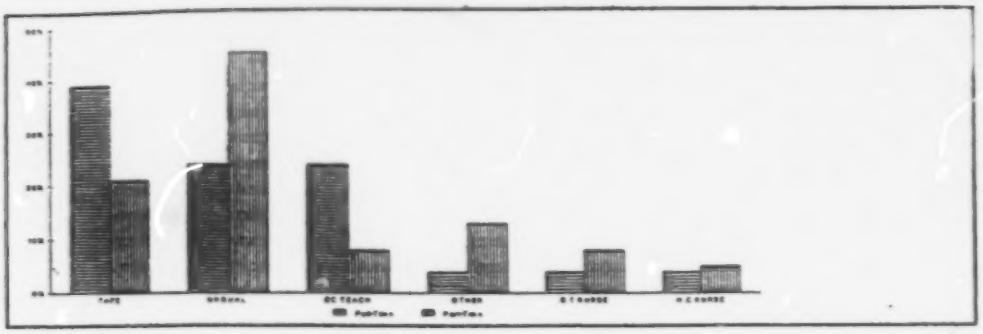
Of the 324 Directors surveyed, 162 returned completed forms, representing a response rate of 50%. The majority of services that responded to the survey were community based (42%), the next largest group being managed by local councils (30%) with the remaining 28% consisting other management structures. Services with a licence capacity between 31-40 places were represented in 63% of those forms returned. As anticipated, most of the respondents were Teaching-Directors (72%) with 23% Non-Teaching Directors and 5% indicating another title such as 'co-ordinator' or 'supervisor'.

Title, Qualifications and Experience

Qualifications of Directors could be divided into four main groups, that is, 76% Early Childhood trained teachers (BEd EC/Dip Teach EC); 2% teachers other than Early Childhood trained; 12% TAFE certificates; and 10% 'other'. 63.5% of Directors stated that they had been teaching 10 years or less; While 69% of respondents stated that they had previous experience as a Director, 60% had held the position of Director for five years or less.

Chart 1 shows the breakdown in positions/qualifications of full-time and part-time staff employed in the centres. It can be seen that Early Childhood trained teachers (BEd EC/Dip Teach EC) make up only 24% of full-time staff along with an equal representation of unqualified staff. The largest group of full-time staff is those with TAFE training (38%).

Chart 1
Breakdown of full-time and part-time staff by qualifications
(All services)



Allocation of Hours for Staff Supervision

44% of all supervisors allocate up to four hours on staff supervision, while 33% allocate between four and eight hours with the remaining 22% indicating 'other' hours. The representation of hours where respondents stated 'other' varied from no hours or none specified (seven respondents); 'ongoing' or 'all of the time' (eleven respondents); and a wide variety of specific hours ranging from 1/2 hour per week per staff member to 28 hours per week in a 24 hour work-based child care centre.

The category 'other' included 32% of respondents who are Non-Teaching Directors. Of this group, 75% did not specify the number of hours allocated to staff supervision but commonly referred to this task as 'ongoing'. It is interesting to note that 60% of supervisors in work-based care are Non-Teaching Directors compared to only 19% in community based centres.

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TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO STAFF SUPERVISION

Supervisor Variables	n	Up to 4 hours		4-8 hours		Other	
		%	n	%	n	%	n
Average hours allocated (all services)	162	44	64	33	48	20	32
Missing = 18							

	Total		Up to 4 hours		4-8 hours		Other	
Release Time	n	%	%	n	%	n	%	n
Yes	97	63	50	42	30	25	20	17
No	56	37	38	20	36	19	26	14
Total	**153**			**62**		**44**		**31**
Missing = 9								

		Up to 4 hours		4-8 hours		Other	
Title	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Non-Teach Dir	37	37	12	34	11	28	9
Teach Dir	116	45	46	35	36	20	21
Other	8	62	5	12	1	25	2
Total	**161**		**63**		**48**		**32**
Missing = 1		Missing = 19					

Release Time

63% of supervisors indicated that they were allocated release time from face to face teaching (Table 1) while 37% stated that they had none. Of those who had designated release time, 50% of those who responded indicated that they allocated up to 4 hours for staff supervision compared to 38% of staff without release time. It is interesting to note that 36% of staff without release time indicated that they spent more than 4 hours on staff supervision compared to 30% of those with release time. Approximately half of the respondents without release time who stated 'other' hours did not specify the amount of time allocated to supervision.

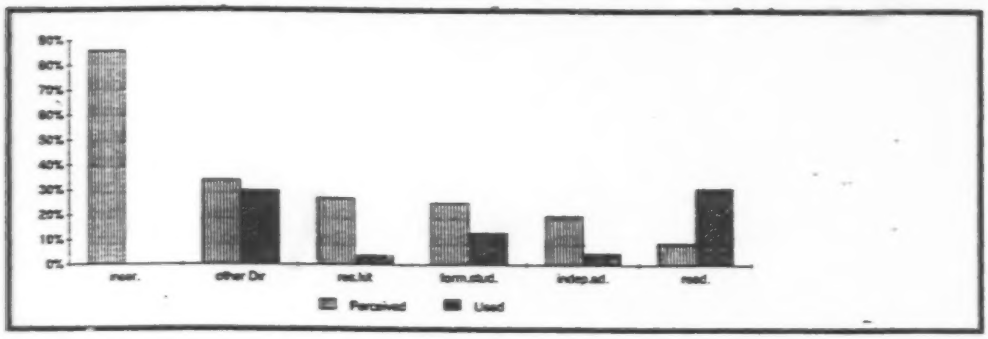
Views on preparedness for Supervision

Preservice training; inservice training; interactions with, and observations of, other Directors; interactions with, and observations of, other staff; informal discussion with colleagues; discussions with the Children's Services Adviser (CSA); and professional reading all rated between 82-100% in terms of significant factors in preparation for supervision. Fifty-three percent of respondents stated that formal training had adequately or partially prepared them for the role of supervisor, 33% felt that they had been inadequately prepared and 14% stated that they had had no formal preparation for supervision.

Strategies used to Enhance Supervision Skills

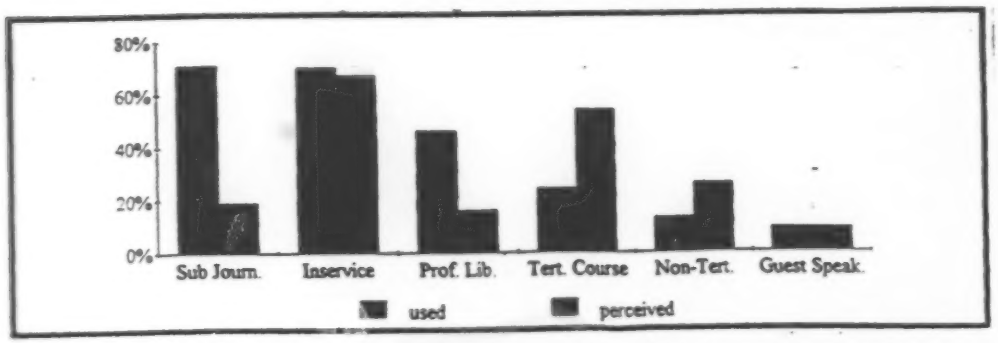
Chart 2 refers to the current strategies used to enhance supervision skills and those perceived to be most effective. No strategies were reported as being used on a regular basis to enhance supervision skills. Professional reading and meetings with other Directors was used regularly by only 30% of supervisors, while formal study, regular supervision with an independent adviser and resource kits were used less frequently.

Chart 2:
Strategies used and perceived as being most effective in enhancing supervision skills



Inservice training is clearly perceived as the most effective strategy to enhance supervision skills. Respondents were not asked if inservice was currently being used as a strategy to enhance supervision skills.

Chart 3
Staff development strategies used and perceived to be most effective



With the exception of inservice, staff development strategies used and those which are thought to be most effective differed greatly. Chart 3 shows that while supervisors used subscriptions to journals and professional resource libraries as a technique to enhance professional development of staff, neither were seen as effective. Inservice training was both utilised and seen to be an effective staff development strategy. Tertiary courses were also perceived as effective but were not reported as being utilised.

Experienced Difficulty in Staff Supervision

Respondents were asked to rate specific supervision tasks (1-5) in order of experienced difficulty, 1 being least difficult and 5 being most difficult. The scores represent the total rating for the 21 issues (Table 2). 'Raising issues of a personal nature', 'dealing with staff:staff conflict', 'raising concerns in relation to poor staff attitudes' assisting staff to set professional goals and 'raising issues of bias in staff' rated as the most difficult issues in staff supervision.

TABLE 2
EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTY IN STAFF SUPERVISION

Number and Percentage of Respondents Who Rated Each Item Most Difficult

	%	n
raising issues of a personal nature	73	116
dealing with staff:staff conflict	72	114
raising concerns in relation to poor staff attitudes	66	105
assisting staff to set professional goals	62	99
raising issues of bias in staff	62	98
giving constructive criticism in relation to prof. prac.	54	86
giving constructive criticism in relation to written planning	54	86
monitoring professional staff relationships	51	82
ensuring staff followup on agreed tasks	51	81
raising concerns in relation to inapprop. prac.	50	79
discussing differences in philosophy	49	78
monitoring the relationship betw. staff & parents	42	67
establishing a leadership role	38	61
raising issues in relation to management of chn	34	54
delegation of admin. tasks	32	51
identifying staff training needs	32	51
disseminating information to staff	30	47
monitoring the rel'ship betw. staff & ch'n	30	48
general performance	29	45
assigning staff tasks and responsibilities	2	36
communication/interactions with other team members	19	30

missing (all responses) = 60

Both in relation to years of teaching experience and years of experience as a Director there is a trend towards lessening difficulties in supervision and increased years of experience.

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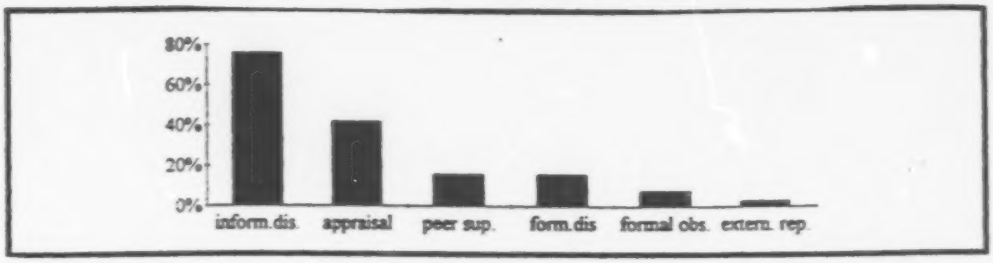
Chart 4
Strategies used to assess the professional development needs of staff



Two strategies most commonly used to assess the professional development needs of staff are informal discussion with individual staff member and the use of a staff appraisal form.

DISCUSSION

Title and Qualifications of Director

Of the survey sample, only 24% of full-time staff are early childhood trained teachers, 76% of this group are represented by the respondents. This highlights the diversity of staff qualifications in long day care centres, and also indicates that the Director in many cases may be the only staff member employed with 3 or 4 year teaching training. It is interesting to note that 69% of respondents stated that they had had previous experience as a Director prior to their present position, possibly indicating that previous experience as a supervisor is seen as a desirable factor in the selection of a Director.

Multiple Staffing

There were ten categories of staff qualifications found within the services represented in the survey. This does not take into account the diversity of qualifications that is identified in the group 'other'. This group includes a variety of overseas qualifications, infant-primary training, disabilities training, and BA's. The findings reflect the trend both in Australia and overseas in relation to the employment of staff with a great diversity of training (Ebbeck, 1991; Veale, 1991; Jorde-Bloom, 1988; Almy, 1981).

The fact that early childhood trained teachers are not representative of the largest group of staff employed is of concern particularly when the results show that there is an equal representation of unqualified staff. This is perhaps even more concerning when considering the research which indicates a high correlation between qualified early childhood teachers and positive outcomes for children in care (Bredekamp, 1989; Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989). The results highlight the challenge for the supervisor who must meet the ongoing professional development needs of staff with diverse levels of skills. The trend towards employment of staff other than Early Childhood trained is more apparent in the employment practices of part-time staff, where 45% employed are unqualified. This reflects the affordability issue, as employment of part-time staff is often crucial in overcoming problems with staff:child ratios, particularly during shift changes and rostered breaks. Employment of unqualified part-time staff may also reflect a trend towards greater delegation of tasks that do not require a high level of expertise but nevertheless are essential to the smooth running of the service. However, supervision becomes more complex when faced not only with limited time and competing demands, but also dealing with practical issues of staff availability. For supervision to occur both the supervisor and the staff member must allocate

mutually convenient, uninterrupted time if the process of supervision is to be effective. The issue of time is verbalised by one Director: 'Time effects all of these (supervision) factors, especially when staff are absent'.

Hours Allocated to Staff Supervision

Release Time: It is clear that although 37% of Directors are not allocated any officially designated release time the reality is that an Teaching-Director's spend a significant proportion of their time on tasks other than face-to-face teaching. This again raises the issue of the complexity of the supervisor's role in Early Childhood settings where there is continual juggling of the supervisor's time between competing depends. The common practice of employing teaching directors imposes the great barrier of 'time' in relation to supervision.

Croll, Lewis, Kelly and Godhard (1993) in a study of the time allocated to specific tasks undertaken by the Director found that of the six major task areas (staff related; parent related; child related; administrative; professional development and other tasks) only 9% of the time was allocated to staff related tasks. In this survey 44% of respondents indicated that they allocated up to 4 hours per week on staff supervision. This was the most common response. As most Directors work a minimum of 40 hours per week, at best, time allocated by this group of respondents represents approximately 10% of the Directors working week, a figure similar to the findings of Croll et al.

Title: When comparing hours allocated to staff supervision in relation to 'title', Non-Teaching Directors are not spending significantly more time on staff supervision than their Teacher-Director colleagues. Non-Teaching Directors represent only 23% of all respondents and most were employed in work-based centres. This may reflect a trend in the employment practices of larger corporations who may perhaps better recognise and acknowledge the status and responsibilities of the Director as a manager or leader within the organisation.

It is clear from the responses of Teaching-Directors that a considerable amount of time is being allocated in the area of staff supervision, taking the Director away from teaching duties. The task of supervision is, of course, not the only responsibility that Directors have outside of the teaching role, making it apparent that the title 'Teaching Director' may have in fact very little to do with classroom teaching.

Views on preparedness for Supervision

Preparedness for supervision is seen to be a critical factor in the continued development of quality early childhood services (Caruso, 1991). This is reflected in the 82-100% agreement rating of factors thought to be important in preparedness for the supervisory role. All respondents strongly agreed that inservice training was an important factor. Strategies such as interactions with other Directors and staff as well as informal discussions with colleagues and the Children's Services Adviser (CSA) were also rated highly. This should be considered in the context of the qualifications of service supervisors, 76% of whom are early childhood teacher trained. It also raises the question of how best to prepare staff for the supervisory role. Respondents indicated some initial preparation could be usefully undertaken at the preservice level, for example, communication skills; conflict resolution. However, many indicated that specific preparation in relation to supervision is more likely to be effective at a later stage. Directors comment: 'I think it's a hands-on experience ... I don't see how you could do much training until you are on the job'.

Strategies used to enhance Supervision skills

Clearly there is no single strategy used predominantly on a regular basis by the respondents to enhance supervision skills. Professional reading was used regularly by only 31% of supervisors, while 79% said they rarely or never used regular sessions with an independent adviser to develop

supervision skills. However, as indicated by the respondents views on preparedness for supervision, discussion with the Children's Services Advisers was rated highly. This conflicts with the response in relation to strategies to enhance supervision skills, where sessions with an independent adviser rated extremely low. The low use of formal study or a resource kit may reflect the lack of access to these types of strategies. Respondents were asked to identify strategies used to enhance their supervision skills and to also state which strategies they felt were most effective in enhancing supervision skills. Supervisors see inservice training as the most valuable method of developing their own supervision skills. It is perhaps the ability of inservice training to specifically target particular issues that would allow for a strong focus on supervision skills. It may also be seen as an opportunity to share and discuss strategies and concerns with colleagues who have a similar professional development need. It is interesting to again note that professional reading is not rated highly. This may reflect the view that discussion and the exchange of ideas and practices is a more effective strategy when attempting to develop skills in the area of supervision.

Experienced Difficulty in Staff Supervision

Raising issues of a personal nature and dealing with staff:staff conflict were reported to be the most difficult issues to be dealt with by the supervisor. Confronting staff about concerns in the workplace and working towards a resolution of those concerns is the role of the supervisor. This task is made more difficult when the supervisor is not able to distance her/himself from being a colleague and member of a team to being the leader. Diversity of perceptions in relation to the role of the early childhood educator will lead to differences in professional commitment, which may result in conflict within the team.

Assisting staff to acknowledge differences in perception and practice while also acknowledging the need for a common set of goals and agreed upon principles of practice requires skilled leadership. Bennis (1989) suggests that in order to achieve this the supervisor must not only possess the ability to draw people together but also to be able to project an image of the organisation that will act as a motivating force. Raising issues of concern in relation to poor staff attitudes and bias in staff requires the supervisor to act as a consciousness raiser. Greenman (1984) suggests that this is a primary task for the Director. It is interesting to find that 'assisting staff to set professional goals' was rated highly as a commonly experienced difficulty among supervisors. This may reflect the difficulties of meeting the needs of the broad range of staff in relation to qualifications and experience. For example, assisting to set goals for a nurse new to the child care industry, a new graduate or an unqualified staff member with 20 years experience presents a range of challenges and issues that require a great deal of expertise from the supervisor. Utilising supervision strategies that will allow for individual needs to be met is clearly a challenge for the Director.

Common to each of the five issues experienced by the respondents as being most difficult is the need for the supervisor to possess highly developed communication skills which would allow the supervisor to articulate concerns and explore strategies to address identified problems without alienating the staff member concerned. Dealing with issues where personal attitudes, values and beliefs have a significant impact on professional practice is perhaps the most challenging of all supervisory tasks (Hegland, 1989; Hoy & Forsyth, 1986; Greenman, 1984).

Concern for individual relationships is seen to be a significant feature of the supervisory task of Early Childhood Directors. It is interesting to note that those issues rank as being least difficult tend to focus on tasks that require less demands on personal/professional values. For example, 'assign tasks & responsibilities'; 'general performance'; 'dissemination of information to staff'. This is supported in the literature which acknowledges the importance of experience and practice as a contributing factor in the development of supervision skills (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1985).

Assessing Skill Development Needs

By far the most commonly reported strategy used to assess the professional development needs of staff is informal discussion, which would require the least demand in terms of time for both the supervisor and the staff member. It also reflects the nature of staff roles in early childhood services in which role diversity and task sharing is the norm (Ebbeck, 1991). Informal discussion requires no fixed time frame, no structure, and no real necessity for follow-up. Again, however, the issue of time becomes a critical factor, as one Director states: 'The role of the teacher-Director is very time constraining, staff supervision often suffers through lack of time'.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, supervision takes place at some level in all services. Whether supervision is used to merely monitor day-to-day job performance or whether it is used as a strategy to promote the professional development of staff remains unclear. What is evident from the study is that the strategies and skills necessary for effective supervision are less than clearly defined by those responsible for this task. Supervisors in child care settings are faced with the management and support of staff with diverse backgrounds, training and experience. This, along with the critical issue of time, represents the major challenges of the supervision task. Allocating more time to staff supervision is not merely a matter of reorganising the workload or reassessing priorities. All teaching Directors are considered as primary contact staff for licensing purposes, therefore, those Directors have a statutory responsibility under the existing child care regulations to ensure that staff:child ratios are maintained at all times. The issue then becomes one of finance, i.e., the employment of additional staff to allow staff release time.

Considering the allocation of time specifically for the task of supervision, it was found that factors such as management structure, licensed places, designated release time and whether or not the supervisor was a teaching or non-teaching Director were not found to be significant in terms of the actual amount of time allocated to the process of supervision. However, this needs to be qualified by taking into account that what is defined as supervision may in fact vary from one Director to another. It also reflects the complex and multifaceted role of the Director who must juggle limited time with competing demands.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that designated release time from face-to-face teaching appears not to be a contributing factor in terms experienced difficulty in supervision. There was, however, a clear trend in relation to experienced difficulty, years of teaching experience, and years of experience as a Director. The results showed that with an increasing levels of experience, both as a teacher and a Director, there is a decrease in the level of experienced difficulty in supervision. This supports the comments by Directors that skills in supervision are developed over a period of time and are gained through a combination of training and experience.

There is little evidence that supervision is carried out in other than an informal manner. Staff appraisals are perhaps the nearest technique to a formal system of supervision. However, it cannot be concluded that informal strategies are not effective, but rather that they are used because they 'best fit' both the team oriented approach to child care and the lack of available release time.

It is concerning to find that there is a general lack of interest in the use of professional reading as a source of information and support for both developing supervision skills and as a means of promoting general professional development. While 75% of all respondents stated that their service subscribed to professional journals, the actual use of such material rated very poorly.

The study indicates that there are a number of areas requiring further research, i.e., how Directors both divide and manage their time; exploration of resources that would assist the Director in the task of supervision that are user-friendly and readily accessible; further exploration of the areas of supervisor experienced difficulty to determine more precisely the nature of these problems; and

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finally, the exploration of an effective model of supervision that could be implemented within the existing constraints of a long day care setting.

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